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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the speech performance characteristic of the college lecturer. One of the most organized forms of speech performance, the lecture functions as a referential monologue and has a necessarily topical focus. Specifically dealt with are the ways in which lecturers introduce new topics, link together topical utterances, and close out episodes. Various transitional tactics are examined as general features of speech that correlate closely with the transitional devices in written communication. The analysis is based on the assumption that connectives are normative features in lecture-type speech acts and that they are rule-governed according to the direction imposed by the speaker on the narrative. The three general rules for maintaining and directing relevance in speech are: (1) topic continuation, (2) topic recycling, and (3) topic change. The editing rule is at work when the lecturer interrupts himself to redirect the lecture. It is found that smooth transitions are attempted by all lecturers regardless of style differences in performance. Examples are provided in an appendix. (CLK)

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TRANSITIONAL SPEECH FEATURES IN THE COLLEGE LECTURE

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In an attempt to analyze speech performance that is characteristic of the college lecturer, it is first necessary to place certain restrictions upon the scope of such a study. Whether it be formal or informal in style, the college lecture is one of the most organized forms of speech performance. It functions as a referential monologue and its focus in necessarily topical. However, it cannot be delivered through isolated topical utterances if overall coherence is to be achieved. Constraints of continuity and relevance are imposed upon the lecturer much the same as they are upon the technical writer.[1] Therefore, such a speaker must employ various tactical devices to reinforce the relationship of each topical unit to the total message of his speech act. The concern here shall be limited to these ways in which lecturers introduce new topics, link together topical utterances, and close out episodes. A corpus of transitional utterances has been recorded for this study from lecturers given by four professors at San Jose State University and this paper will attempt to analyze the various transitional tactics as general features of speech that correlate closely with transitional devices in written communication. The analysis will be based on the assumption that connectives are normative features of lecture-type speech acts and, moreover, that they are rule-governed in accordance with the direction a lecturer imposes upon his narrative.

General Transitional Rules

Three general rules[2] for maintaining and directing relevance in speech are 1) topic continuation, 2) topic recycling, and 3) topic change. As will be shown, these rules also correspond with strategies that impose continuity on written narratives. In many respects, however, the oral genre departs from the literary transitional tactics, for speech performance requires spontaneity and operates with less planning and control than does written communication. Therefore, another body of devices, which have been incorporated here under the 'editing' rule, will also be considered in this analysis of transitional speech features.

The first of the general rules, topical continuation, is the use of connectives to direct topical utterances as probes into preceeding topics. It is a device that enables the speaker to move from one topic to a related topic, to covertly suggest the relevance between the two, and to proceed using the same speech pattern. As with subordinate sequence paragraph construction (written), the tendency is to introduce something new at each level that is developed in the next level. Examples of topical continuation found in informal lecture material (see appendix) demonstrate the wide range of possible formulations:

"This whole thing about _____ also applies to _____."

"Um, there are several reasons why _____ hasn't come up so far, and one is _____."

"The same thing took place with regard to _____."

More specifically, when the rule of topic continuation is applied, a choice of special syntatic devices is open to the lecturer. He may a) repeat a word or phrase from a previous utterance, b) use a synonym for a word in a preceding sentence, or c) introduce a pronoun whose antecedent was in the sentence that came before. From the data here the last choice is easiest to isolate:

"Some of this of course depends on _____."

"Now that won't happen unless _____."

"Keep in mind here that most of what we're talking about is _____."

"So that's why _____."

(Note: pronoun or pronoun phrases have been underlined only for my emphasis.)

Sequencing, however, need not necessarily be subordinate as in the above examples of topic continuation, but may be co-ordinate. That is, a lecturer may initially assert that he will bring up several points and overtly mark each as it occurs in the lecture:

"But two different things are involved here, ___ & ___."

"Oh! So here comes the inevitable, there are three _____s."

"The second _____ I talked about is _____."

"All right, there's all kinds of stuff about _____."

"_____, the other thing I wanted to mention. . ."

"A couple of things, first of all _____."

"Now getting back to our four basic _____."

"There are two terms which are used interchangeably, _____ & ____."

"Now there are three great factors that have altered . . ."

"Okay? . . . all right so . . . for point one of _____. . ."

Secondly, and in contrast to topic continuation, is the rule for topic recycling. This rule is applied when the lecturer wishes not to string together overlapping topical utterances, but to elaborate some antecedent topic. In this way he can talk about the same thing over and over until he feels he has made his point clear enough to move on to another topic. Recycling can take the form of examples, contrasts, and analogies:

"And you find examples of this _____"

"Maybe some other examples of this too, . . ."

"Uhm, well here . . . (pause) . . . Another example of this too would be . . ."

"So I guess that the major things this illustrates are . . ."

"Also, um, another kind of _____ would be _____"

"If you look at _____ as a _____"

"So you've got this, uh, oh what would be a good analogy?"

"Uh, _____ is a whole separate bag of worms from _____"

As with topic continuance, recycling can go on indefinitely or until the lecturer feels that his topic has been sufficiently covered. Yet when the later does occur the third rule for maintaining relevance, topic change, can be applied. It would seem from the data that by the time a professor has reached this final stage of an episode he has nearly exhausted his supply of subtle connectives for in closing off or limiting a previous topic most lecturers tend to rely on a summons -like device such as

"Any comments or questions on _____?"

"Shall we move on to bigger and better things?"

"So is it all right if I talk about _____ now?"

"Got any questions about _____? Okay, let's talk about _____."

"Any more you wanna say about that? . . . Okay, we talked about _____ last time, . . . did I tell you about ?"

"You don't wanna talk about _____, do ya?"

Even when audience response is not directly summoned, we find that lecturers use rather abrupt tactics to indicate topic change.

"That's about all we're gonna say about _____."

"Next time we're gonna talk about _____."

"Well, I haven't got time to go into this, but . . ."

One possible explanation for this lack of smooth transition might be that since there is such a conscious awareness of the constraints of continuity and relevance the lecturer feels obliged to mark the closing of topics in obvious ways so that the material to follow will not seem irrelevant. This consciousness of constraint also gives rise to devices such as touched-off utterances, metalinguistic side sequences, and false starts, which either function as transitions or apologies for deviation. All are variations of the editing rule.

The Editing Rule

When a lecturer interrupts himself so that there is a break in the flow of

referential speech, he is signaling to his listeners that the direction he has been taking is deviant from what was intended. In technical writing, of course, this sort of interruption never becomes apparent. Therefore, besides the general rules for maintaining in-course relevance, a lecturer also has a rule to get him back on course whenever he finds himself wandering. For purposes of this paper this has been termed the editing rule. One editing tactic, the metalinguistic interruption device, comments on the form of language being used in the lecture but does not serve to shift the topic. The most outstanding example recorded for this analysis was

> "Anny-waay, . . . I'm going to change my name to Sammy Sidetrack--you'd never know we came here to talk about _____ . . ." (continues topic)

Touched-off utterances, another form of editing, may or may not shift the topic, but usually do if they relate closely to something being said. When signaled these interruptions take such forms as

> "Oh, that reminds me of _____"
>
> "Okay, but before going into _____, it would be better to talk about _____"
>
> "Also this business also brings up something that I wanted to mention last time but forgot to bring up . . ."
>
> "And I'll mention this later but there are also . . ."
>
> "Which is what we're gonna talk about today (looks at watch)
>
> "Why are we talkin' about <u>that</u>? . . . Oh, so the _____ is . . . "
>
> "_____, that I'm about to describe to you here, . . ."

Although as an editing tactic they appear unintentional, false starts seem to reveal that verbal planning is going on and they do in fact interrupt the flow of referrential speech so that the lecturer can regain continuity

> "There's a . . (long pause) . . One thing I should mention is _____."
>
> "Um, the wh . . . This is a class about _____ and more or less we've hit all the major aspects of _____."
>
> "Remember we ta-- . . . Did we talk about _____ as a part of the _____?"
>
> "Although . . . well . . no . . . I guess that's later."
>
> "Okay? . . . Uh . . . at some point in the field of _____ there was a . . ."

Naturally, employment of any of the rules discussed above is idiosyncratic, and as can be seen in the appendix material, some lecturers tend to take stronger preference for one particular rule. It would seem that connectives are more rule-governed when conscious awareness of speech perfor-

mance is taking place; especially when the speaker is projecting as to what must be said next and how to lead into future topics gracefully.

What has been most interesting, though, is the evidence that smooth transitions are attempted by all of the lecturers regardless of their stylistic differences in speech performance. These are the features of referential monologues that bind topical complexities into large units so that they may become conceptually digestable. Most amusing to the topically disinterested listener are the metalinguistic editings of lecturers. These reveal that there has been a breakdown in organization, a loss of form. The devices not only add conversational life to the offering of factual information but also communicate the speaker's conscientious concern for his listener.

NOTES

[1]Susan Ervin-Tripp, "On Sociolinguistic Rules: Alternation and Co-occurrence, from Directions in Sociolinguistics, eds. Gumperz and Hymes, 1972. Page 243

[2]Introduced by Kjolseth and discussed by Ervin-Tripp, page 243

APPENDIX

PROFESSOR "W"

"Now please note, if you can read that, (points to note on board) that we will have an exam on Monday . . ."(discusses exam)

"Now today I brought a film in . . . (discusses film). . ." (after film:) "as I said before the film, this was _____"

"Any questions or comments on this film?"

"Well let me explain this to some extent . . ."

(side sequence:) "_____, that I'm about to describe to you here, . . ."

"Any other points that should be aired while this is fresh in your minds? What about the _____?"

"Well, let's take a look in the remaining few minutes here at _____"

"But now reflecting back to our discussion of _____"

"Now let me say one other thing here because of _____"

"I'll steer us around on Friday to _____ and talk a little bit more about it, but . . ."

"_____, I might mention in passing here, have been . . ."

"Keep in mind here that most of what we're talking about is _____"

"Some of you asked that I bring in extra copies of _____, . ."

"Now getting back to our four basic _____"

"The other day I was talking about _____"

"There are two terms which are used interchangeably: _____ and _____"

"Let's look at the situation with regard to _____"

"But the point that I was leading up to was that _____"

"But turning back to the _____, I want to make some distinctions here which are often misunderstood."

"Now today I want to finish up _____ so we can get on to _____"

"Now are there any questions that we haven't resolved in the area of _____, especially on the . . . "

"But on the _____, for instance, ..."

"The same thing took place with regard to _____"

"Now there are three great factors that have altered,"

"But by and large, we would have to state that _____"

"But because of these three things I have mentioned here we do find that _____ has occured."

"The (pause) . . . situation isn't entirely new, I don't mean to say that _____"

"But in closing this part out, you will find that _____"

"Now once again for those of you who came in late, I . . ."

PROFESSOR "X"

"Well, we're ready to do _____!"

"The _____ I was talking about is on page 35, did I read it to you?"

"Okay, any other reactions to _____?"

"Any other things about _____?"

"Okay: _____ and _____."

"_____, is another thing I wanted to include too,. . ."

"Now tell me something about _____"

"_____, the other thing I wanted to mention, ..."

"Well, I havenit got time to go into this but, _____"

"In other words, if you want to raise the question, _____, . ."

"Now, what about _____, . . How is _____ mentioned in this book?"

"A couple of things, first of all _____, . ."

"At any rate all I was trying to say was if you've ever seen a _____, . ."

PROFESSOR "Y"

"It was pointed out, pointedly, last time that _____"

"Uh, this (handout) is from _____"

"I guess it would be good probably to talk about _____"

"Uh, so what's happening here in terms of _____?"

"There's one interesting thing here too, _____"

"Also this business also brings up something that I wanted to mention last time but forgot to bring up, _____"

"So I guess that the major things this illustrates are _____"

"Along that same line _____ is _____"

"Um, so . . I guess I should have numbered this because _____"

"Another thing I've noticed about this is _____"

"So, how would you feel about_____?"

"So, is it all right if I talk about _____ now?"

"There are two main _____ I'm using _____, . . "

"I guess the last thing I was talking about last time was _____"

"Well, _____ is something that _____"

"Although . . . well no, . . I guess that's later (drops unintroduced topic before ever introducing it)

"The second _____ I talked about is _____"

"Although I should mention that _____"

"Um, oh, here are some other _____"

"And I'll mention this later but there are also _____"

"Also, um, another kind of _____ would be _____"

"This whole thing about _____ also applies to _____"

"Oh, and that reminds me of _____"

"Uhm, the _____ is also a case of _____"

"Then there is another form of _____"

"Some of this of course depends on _____"

"There's a . . . One thing I should mention is _____"

"This kinda ties in with _____ too"

"There are other things too, uh, _____"

"Uh, and also there are _____"

"But two different things are involved here: _____ and _____"

"Oh! And another thing too about _____ is _____"

"There are also some other _____ revolving around _____"

"Okay, but before going into _____ it would be better to talk about_____"

"Oh, so here comes the inevitable, there are three _____"

"I guess I'll have to talk about _____ later" (glances at clock)

"First off, I'll begin with an announcement, . . ."

"It's pretty clear that there are _____ and also _____"

"Then there's also _____"

"As far as _____ go, . . ."

"In fact, what are some of the _____, . . ."

"And this is something I mentioned in the beginning too: _____"

"What this all comes down to actually is _____"

"And you find examples of this _____"

"Maybe some other examples of this too, . . ."

"Actually, in this respect . . ."

"Uhm, well here . . . another example of this too _____, let's say with _____, . ."

"As far as _____ goes, . . ."

"One thing which is also true is _____"

"Another aspect of this too would be _____"

"There are some other aspects of this too, _____"

"I have an anecdote to start with which illustrates _____,"

"Um, okay, I guess today would be the day to talk about _____"

"Does anybody have any comments on _____?"

"An interesting thing though, I don't think I mentioned this before but,_____"

"Oh that whole thing with ___? Well . . . (expands on topic)

"I've noticed though, that _____, . . "

"Also, this seems to be a point of _____ now too."

"Although I hear that in _____ it's even more . . ."

"Um, . . . _____"

"Well, actually here's another one where . . . and it's _____"

"Um, it was kind of intriguing that the . . . was _____"

"This is slightly . . . but its something that was brought up in . . . it's that _____"

"There was an interesting footnote, but I don't know whether you read this or not, in the article that brought up _____, . . ."

"Oh, a little later it struck me, though, that _____"

PROFESSOR "Z"

"I did mention at some point that, uh, _____"

"Um, and this is interesting because more or less the general conclusion is that _____"

"So that's why _____"

"Um the, uh, this is a class about _____ and more or less we've hit all the major aspects of _____"

"If you look at _____ as a _____, . ."

"Um, there are several reasons why _____ hasn't come up so far and one is _____"

"Now. Within the study of _____ that was looked at as . . ."

"Now. One problem with _____ is, . . ."

"You will remember that _____ is a device that . . ."

"Remember we ta-- . . . Did we talk about _____ as a part of the _____?"

"Any more you wanna say about that?" . . . Okay we talked about _____ last time. Did I tell you about _____?"

"This _____ (holds up handout) we didn't talk about this, right?"

(in midst of a paragraph a topic is named) "_____." (looks at watch,) . . . Which is what we're gonna talk about today? . . . (continues old topic)

"Anny-waay, . . . (I'm going to change my name to Sammy Sidetrack - - you'd never know we came here to talk about _____) . . ."

"Let's knock this class off now and if any of you have any questions you can come up front here and . . ."

"Got any questions about _____? Okay let's talk about _____."

"That is to say, what is the origin of _____,"

"Okay, let's just run through some of the _____"

"And so! (pause) . . . We are talking about _____, and we just finished_____"

"Now on the other end of things (pause) . . . well, before we look at that, let's look at _____"

"Now the traditional way of looking at _____ is, . . ."

"The next stage involves _____"

"Um, . . . the same thing happens when _____"

"All right, there's all kinds of stuff about _____"

"Did we talk about the issue of _____?"

"Another thing you'll notice about _____ is . . ."

"So, you've got this, uh, oh what would be a good analogy? . . . Oh, well, . . ."

"Why are we talkin' about that? . . . Oh, so the _____ is . . ."

"Uh, but ya know there's a lot of that just to _____ . . "

"Uhm. Very difficult to _____ and _____ is particulary ____ because . . ."

"The _____ has had a kind of funny history, it . . ."

"Now that won't happen unless _____"

"Um, well this is all by the way of setting up a connection of ____ and ____"

"And the question is, _____"

"Uh, _____ is a whole separate bag of worms from _____"

"Uhm, and interestingly enough, I think, is the _____"

"Uh, ya know, more of the ____ marbles have gone away from ____ and into ___"

"Any comments or questions on _____?"

"That's about all we're gonna say about _____"

"Next time we're gonna talk about _____"

"Um, anyway, notice that even _____, . . ."

"And what developed out of that was what we refer to as _____"

"So really the thing that kicked off the field of _____, "

"So its really a losing notion to talk about _____ as opposed to _____"

"The obvious thing about _____ is"

"Uh, it is of course true that _____, but . . ."

"So you no doubt recall that _____"

"So really the way we approached _____ was . . ."

"That's why in _____"

"You don't wanna talk about _____, do ya?"

"Okay, let's talk about _____ instead"

"Okay? . . . All right so ... . for point one of _____, . ."

"Okay and that's what you would do for _____"

"Looking back at the _____ problems we did, do you have any unanswered questions or unresolved issues?"

"Okay so, look at the _____, do you have any questions about that?"

"Okay? (pause) . . Um. At some point in the field of ____ there was a ____"

"Just as in dealing with _____ it is . . ."

"Shall we move on to bigger and better things?"

"Also, notice about _____ that . . ."

"Okay, so there's been a shift in emphasis from _____ to _____"

"Uhm, very interesting to the field of _____ is how _____."